Chapter 12 Straw

WELL ...
...THE YOUNG LADY WAS CONCERNED ABOUT THIS OLD MAN'S LEGS.
TOOK THE SCENIC ROUTE, DID YOU, PA?
I'VE CRUMBLED THE CHARCOAL ALREADY.
ALL RIGHT.
LET'S MIX IT WITH THE HERBS RIGHT AWAY AND GET THEM TO DRINK IT.

YOU DID A FAIR JOB OF TREATING THEM.
JUST FAIR?
PA'S AMAZ-ING.
HE'S THE KIND OF PERSON WHO CAN TAKE A SINGLE PIECE OF INFORMA-TION...
STARE
...AND DEDUCE ANOTHER TWO OR THREE MORE THINGS FROM IT.

WHAT THEY FIRST VOMITED UP...
I IN-SPECTED IT ALL. I CAN DO THIS.
STARE
MAO-MAO.
THE GLASS SHARDS ON THE FLOOR.
THE SCATTERED TOBACCO.
MY FATHER LIKES TO QUIZ ME THIS WAY ON OCCASION TO TEACH ME SOME-THING.
SSK
WHAT KIND OF POISON DO YOU THINK THIS IS?
THERE IT IS.

TOBACCO IS EASY TO OBTAIN.
WHEN EATEN, ITS EFFECTS ARE IMMEDIATE. THEY MAKE YOU FEEL LIKE YOU'RE CHOKING.
IT'S JUST THE THING FOR COMMITTING A LOVERS' SUICIDE.
IT LOOKS LIKE YOU HELD OFF ON GIVING THEM WATER, HMM?
WELL, THE EFFECT OF DOING SO WOULD HAVE BEEN CONTRARY TO WHAT ONE MIGHT EXPECT, RIGHT?
MM.
GASTRIC JUICES CAN PREVENT THE ABSORPTION OF POISON ...
...SO MAKING THEM DRINK WATER COULD'VE DILUTED THOSE AND MADE THE SITUATION WORSE.

...THEN IT MIGHT BE BEST TO DILUTE IT FURTHER.
!
...THE TOBACCO HAD ORIGINALLY BEEN DISSOLVED IN WATER...
BUT IF...
...I DIDN'T SEE ANY TOBACCO IN THEIR VOMIT.
AS I RECALL ...
MAYBE I'M JUST NOT ENTIRELY AWAKE YET.
IT'S NOT THAT I HADN'T NOTICED, BUT I OVER-LOOKED IT ALL THE SAME.

EX-CUSE ME...
OKAY, GOT IT MEMO-RIZED.
SOMETIMES IT'S BETTER TO DILUTE SOMETHING THAT'S BEEN DISSOLVED IN WATER, MAOMAO.
WOW, SOME-ONE IS CLEARLY IN A BAD MOOD.
OKAY, WE'RE COM-ING.
TURN
FOL-LOW ME.
THE TEA'S READY.
むすっ
SULK
I'M SO SORRY ABOUT ALL THIS!

WHAT A GENEROUS MADAM.
SHE EVEN BROKE OUT THE TEA AND SNACKS USUALLY RESERVED FOR CLIENTS.
COME, NOW. SIT! NO NEED TO BE SHY!
A PIECE OF STRAW?
IT'S LIKE THE ONE ON THE FLOOR IN THAT ROOM.
THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP TODAY, TRULY.
SHE MUST BE USING THIS TO DRINK HER TEA...
...AND AVOID MARKING THE CUP WITH THE ROUGE ON HER LIPS.
OH, I SEE.
112

WELL ...
...AS LONG AS HE GETS PAID, THAT'S GOOD ENOUGH.
PLEASE, TAKE THIS.
WE'RE JUST DOING OUR JOB.
OH, THANK YOU.
...THE POISONED COURTE-SAN LIES SLEEPING.
IN A ROOM OVER THAT WAY...

A LOVERS' SUICIDE ISN'T ALL THAT UNCOMMON IN THESE PARTS.
BRING TOGETHER A MAN WITH NO MONEY AND A WOMAN WHOSE CONTRACT HAS YET TO END...
...AND IT'LL TURN OUT LIKE THIS, MORE OFTEN THAN NOT.
HOW-EVER, THAT FELLOW...
HE HAS THE AIR OF SOMEONE WHO REGULARLY FREQUENTS THESE PLACES, BUT THE CLOTHES HE WAS WEARING WERE MADE OF FINE COTTON.
I KNOW I'M BEING BIASED ...
WE'LL FIND EACH OTHER AGAIN...
...IN THE NEXT LIFE!
...BUT HE JUST DOESN'T SEEM DESPERATE ENOUGH TO TAKE POISON IN GRIEF...
...OVER A FUTURE HE CAN'T HAVE WITH THE WOMAN HE LOVES.
THEN THERE'S HIS HAND-SOME FACE...
NOT THE SORT OF MAN WHO WOULD BE HAVING MONEY OR WOMEN TROUBLES.

I'M GOING TO GO TAKE A LOOK AT HOW THEY'RE DOING.
HEY, PA.
HM?
GLINT キラッ
I SHOULD LOOK IN ON HIM FIRST.
THE MAN WAS FAR WORSE OFF THAN THE COURTESAN.
115

SNATCH
WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING ?!
STAY OUT OF MY WAY!
HIS KIND'S BETTER OFF DEAD!

BONK
OOF!
UGH!
MY HANDS ARE TIED.
GIVE IT TO ME!
.....
WAH!
WAAAAAAAH!
WAAH!
SNIFF
SNIFF

OH MY GOOD-NESS!
WHAT IN THE WORLD'S GOING ON IN HERE?
GAH.
WAAAA
WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO HER?!
THIS JUST GETS WORSE AND WORSE.
AAAH!
PLEASE DON'T TELL ANYONE ELSE ABOUT THIS.

HER OLDER SISTER WAS WORKING AT ANOTHER ESTABLISH-MENT LIKE THIS ONE, YOU SEE.
SNIFF
THAT MAN OFFERED TO BUY OUT HER CONTRACT.
SHE EVEN WROTE THIS POOR THING A HAPPY LETTER ALL ABOUT IT.
BUT THEN ...
...HE SUDDENLY WENT BACK ON HIS OFFER...
...AND, UNABLE TO BEAR IT, HER SISTER KILLED HERSELF.

HE SEDUCES WOMEN AND HINTS AT BUYING THEIR FREEDOM ...
...BEFORE TOSSING THEM ASIDE WHEN HE GROWS BORED. HE'S NOTORIOUS FOR DOING THIS.
ALL HE'S DONE IS WIN THE IRE OF MANY A COURTE-SAN.
HE WAS NEARLY STABBED ONCE BY A FRENZIED WOMAN...
...AND HE'S BEEN POISONED BEFORE.
BUT...
...HIS FATHER IS A WEALTHY MERCHANT ...
...AND HE'S ALWAYS THERE TO CLEAN UP HIS SON'S MESSES WITH MONEY.
LATELY, HE'S EVEN BEEN BRINGING GUARDS AROUND WITH HIM TO THE BROTHELS, PROVIDED BY DADDY AT HIS REQUEST.

I SHOULD FEEL PITY AND TURN A BLIND EYE TO HER BLOOD-LUST?
SO... WHAT ...?
THIS GIRL WAS ALSO CLOSE TO THE WOMAN...
...WHO TOOK POISON TODAY.
IF HIS MISDEEDS ARE SO WELL KNOWN, WOULDN'T IT HAVE BEEN BETTER TO SIMPLY BAN HIM, THEN?
TRYING TO SHUT ME UP WITH EM-PATHY, HMM?
THE UPROAR OVER A COURTESAN LURING IN A MAN TO ATTEMPT A LOVERS' SUICIDE...
...WILL ONLY CAUSE HEADACHES FOR THE BROTHEL, WON'T IT?
THAT WOMAN WAS THE ONE WHO BROUGHT HIM IN...
...SEDUCED BY HIS HONEYED WORDS.
122

SO WE GOT THAT GRACIOUS RECEPTION BECAUSE...
...THE MADAM WAS GRATEFUL THE SON OF A WEALTHY MERCHANT DIDN'T DIE ON HER WATCH, HUH?
...EVERY-ONE'S PALPABLE RELIEF AT THE SURVIVAL OF THE HORRIBLE MAN...
...MUST HAVE SEEMED ABSURD TO THE GIRL.
AND ...
KOFF!
KOFF!
SNIFF
SNIFF
PEEK

VERY WELL.
YOU'D TYPICALLY CALL A DOCTOR FOR AN EMERGENCY LIKE THAT.
ASSUMING SHE PICKED THE APOTHECARY ON PURPOSE, KNOWING HE WOULD BE ELSEWHERE...
IF PA HAD BEEN THE ONLY ONE AROUND—
WAIT.
...IT'S A GOOD THING I CHANCED TO BE HOME.
STILL ...
AN APPRENTICE WHO'S ALWAYS RUNNING ERRANDS ...
...WOULD KNOW WHEN MY FATHER WOULD BE OUT, WOULDN'T SHE?

HER SMALL STATURE BELIES HER FRIGHT-ENING MIND.
THAT LITTLE GIRL...
ALL THIS ...
...TO BRING PA OVER.
I BET THAT'S ALSO WHY IT TOOK HER SO LONG...
...BECAUSE HER HATRED FOR THAT MAN IS SO GREAT.

I HAD TO CHECK SINCE YOU'D JUST LET IT GO OTHER-WISE. YOU'RE TOO NICE.
MM! SHE PAID YOU FAIRLY.
HUSH MONEY TOO. I KNEW IT!
PA.
LET ME SEE WHAT SHE GAVE YOU.
JUST WHEN YOU FINALLY CAME HOME TOO. WHAT ROTTEN LUCK.
I NEVER GOT TO TAKE MY BATH.
UGH, I'M COVERED IN SWEAT FROM ALL THE RUNNING AROUND.
THE NETWORK THERE IS GOOD AT GETTING THE WORD OUT ABOUT THIS SORT OF THING.
AFTER THIS, THAT GUY'LL PROBABLY BE BANNED FROM THE PLEASURE DISTRICT COMPLETELY.
THEIR CONDI-TIONS WERE STABLE, SO THEY'LL BE ALL RIGHT NOW, WON'T THEY?

BUT I WONDER WHY...
...SOMETHING ABOUT ALL THIS KEEPS EATING AT ME.
A MAN HATED BY EVERYONE, RIGHT DOWN TO THE YOUNG APPRENTICE.
BUT ...
...BY ALL ACCOUNTS, HE SOUNDS RATHER SLY AND SELFISH.
WOULD SUCH A MAN REALLY FALL SO HEAD OVER HEELS FOR ANOTHER THAT HE'D BE WILLING TO TAKE PART IN A LOVERS' SUICIDE?
...WHAT IF IT WASN'T THAT AT ALL?
WHISPER
MAO-MAO.

YOU MUSTN'T SPECULATE ALOUD.
THAT FACE.
I CAN TELL HE ALREADY KNOWS THE TRUTH.
THINK, MAO-MAO.
WHAT WAS IN THE BED-CHAMBER?
WHAT AM I MISSING?

SCATTERED TOBACCO.
A BROKEN GLASS.
AN UNCON-SCIOUS MAN AND WOMAN.
...THE TOBACCO HAD ORIGI-NALLY BEEN DISSOLVED IN WATER...
BUT IF...

A SINGLE GLASS.
A STRAW ON THE FLOOR NEARBY.
TWO KINDS OF LIQUOR, EACH A DIFFERENT COLOR:

PLIP
DRIP
DRIP

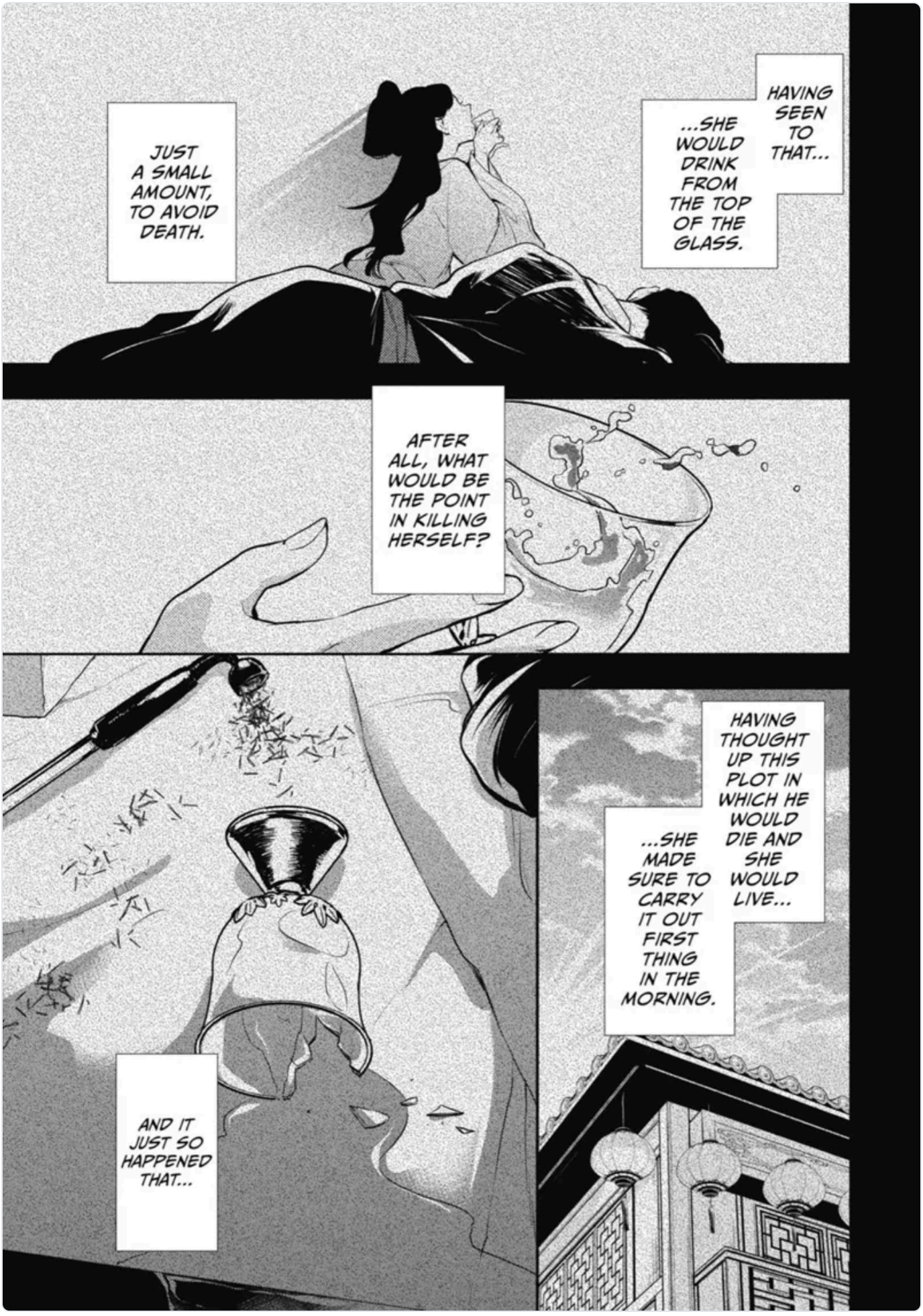
PAT
IT'S...
...OVER AND DONE WITH ALREADY.

I KNOW.
...THE WOULD-BE MURDERESS IS THE COURTESAN.
THIS WAS NO FAILED LOVERS' SUICIDE. IT WAS AN ATTEMPTED MURDER.
ON TOP OF THAT ...

...TO DRINK SOMETHING POISONED.
THE PROB-LEM...
...WAS GETTING A MAN SO CAUTIOUS THAT HE EVEN BRINGS GUARDS TO A BROTHEL...
AND TO KILL THE MAN...
...SHE USED LIQUOR STEEPED WITH TO-BACCO.
ALL SHE HAD TO DO WAS DRINK IT HERSELF FIRST TO SHOW HIM IT WAS SAFE.
THE SOLU-TION WAS A SIMPLE ONE.
THAT'S WHERE THE STRAW CAME IN.
...IF SHE ACTUALLY DRANK THE POISONED LIQUOR.
OF COURSE, THE WOMAN COULDN'T ESCAPE HARM...
SEEING THE COURTESAN COME TO NO HARM, HE WOULD DRINK IT WITHOUT A SECOND THOUGHT.

TWO TYPES OF LIQUOR.
ONE GLASS.
THE LIQUORS HAVE DIFFERENT COLORS, WEIGHTS, DENSITIES.
THEY WOULD SEPARATE WHEN MIXED, THOUGH NOT AS MUCH AS OIL AND WATER.
POURING THE TWO DRINKS INTO A CLEAR GLASS WOULD CREATE...
...A LOVELY, LAYERED CONCOC-TION.
THE WOMAN MUST HAVE THEN...
...DRUNK FROM THE BOTTOM LAYER WITH THE STRAW.
PERHAPS SHE WAS IN THE HABIT OF ENTERTAIN-ING HER CLIENTS WITH THE LITTLE ACT.

AND SO, THE MAN WOULD PUT THE GLASS TO HIS LIPS AND DRINK FROM THE TOP.
THIS WOULD NOT HAVE AROUSED HIS SUSPICIONS SINCE THE STRAWS...
...ARE WIDELY USED.
AFTER CONFIRMING HE WAS OUT COLD...
...THE COURTESAN WOULD THEN SCATTER THE SMOKED TOBACCO AROUND THE ROOM...
...TO COVER UP THE ODOR OF THE POISONED LIQUOR...
...AND TO MAKE IT LOOK LIKE THE PAIR HAD COMMITTED A LOVERS' SUICIDE BY INGESTING THE POISON.


JUST A SMALL AMOUNT, TO AVOID DEATH.
...SHE WOULD DRINK FROM THE TOP OF THE GLASS.
HAVING SEEN TO THAT...
AFTER ALL, WHAT WOULD BE THE POINT IN KILLING HERSELF?
AND IT JUST SO HAPPENED THAT...
...SHE MADE SURE TO CARRY IT OUT FIRST THING IN THE MORNING.
HAVING THOUGHT UP THIS PLOT IN WHICH HE WOULD DIE AND SHE WOULD LIVE...

我有心
...SOMEONE WAS THERE TO DISCOVER THEM.
SHE'S AWAKE.
FRAGILE...
...YET CUNNING.

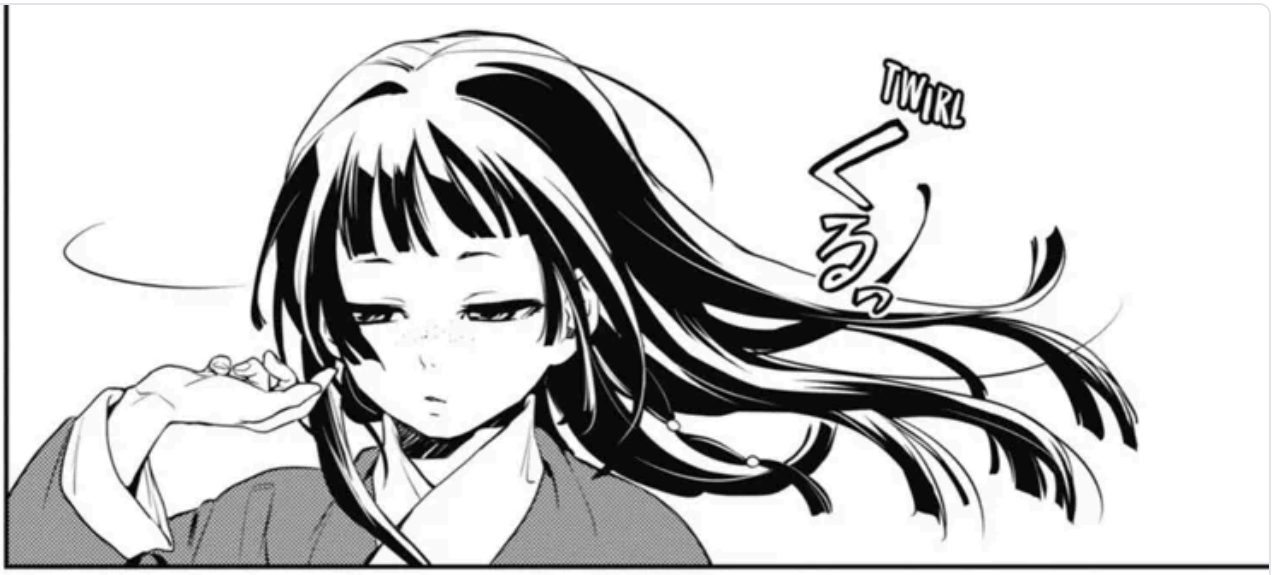
SHUT
MISS!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING OUT HERE?
THE BEHAVIOR OF THAT YOUNG APPRENTICE WHO WAS TRYING TO KILL THE MAN...
...STILL DOESN'T SIT RIGHT WITH ME.
INSTEAD OF THE DOCTOR, SHE WENT TO THE APOTHE-CARY FIRST...
...TO ENSURE THE MAN WOULD BE BEYOND SAVING.
WAS SHE NOT CONCERNED FOR THE COURTESAN WHO'S LIKE A SISTER TO HER?
SHE ALSO WASTED TIME WHEN BRINGING MY FATHER OVER.

HAD IT NOT CROSSED HER MIND...
...THAT ANOTHER PERSON CLOSE TO HER COULD'VE DIED...
...JUST LIKE HER ACTUAL ELDER SISTER DID WHEN SHE TOOK HER OWN LIFE?
IT'S ALMOST AS IF—
—AS IF SHE KNEW THE COURTESAN WASN'T GOING TO DIE...
...AND ACTED BASED ON THAT.
OR MAYBE I'M JUST OVER-THINKING IT.

...AND THE WELL-PAYING MADAM...
THERE'S ALSO THE COURTE-SAN WHO SYMPA-THIZED WITH THE GIRL...
THE MORE I THINK ABOUT IT, THE MORE SUSPICIOUS IT ALL GETS.
BUT I GUESS I SHOULDN'T SPECULATE OUT LOUD.

IT'S A GARDEN AND A BIRDCAGE AT THE SAME TIME.
I'D BEEN YEARNING TO RETURN TO THE PLEASURE DISTRICT FOR A LONG TIME...
...BUT IT ISN'T ALL THAT DIFFERENT FROM THE INNER COURT IN ESSENCE.
...THE MORE THEY BECOME SWEET POISON THEM-SELVES.
AND THE MORE THE COURTESANS GROW INTOXICATED BY THAT AIR...
EVERY-ONE...
...TRAPPED IN THIS PLACE IS BEING POISONED BY THE AIR HERE.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT FATE HAS IN STORE FOR THAT COURTE-SAN.

PER-HAPS...
...SHE'LL BE ACCUSED OF POISONING THAT PRODIGAL SON.
OR PERHAPS THE MADAM MIGHT TRY TO THREATEN HIM BY CLAIMING HE WAS OUT TO SPOIL HER GOODS.
IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT HAPPENS. IT'S NOTHING TO DO WITH ME.
DWELLING ON EVERY LITTLE THING...
...WILL SPELL YOUR DOOM IN THIS TOWN.


TWIRL
くるっ

...GO HAVE THAT BATH AT VERDI-GRIS...
YAAAWN
MAYBE I WILL ...